



Press Release

For release on 30 January 2013

Anti - Leprosy Day

30th January 2013

In commemoration of Mahatma Gandhi's Martyrdom, 30th January, is observed as Anti Leprosy Day.

In 2011 a total number of 1,27,295 new leprosy cases were reported across India. Of these 47,111 were women and 12,305 children.

Each year over one lakh people in India are diagnosed with leprosy which means there are about **350 people are newly diagnosed with leprosy each day, in India.**

India alone accounts for 55% of the global leprosy burden.

Leprosy as a disease has been scientifically and medically proven to be curable with Multi Drug Therapy (MDT). However, the fact is that millions of people affected by leprosy and their family members still suffer from consequences of leprosy not just as a disease, but also from social, economic, cultural, political, and legal discrimination and ostracization due to lack of awareness and misconceptions prevailing in the society, such as, leprosy is incurable or hereditary or leprosy is the result of one's past sin or curse from God, etc.

Reducing the burden of leprosy is possible by detecting cases at an early stage of the infection and administering prompt treatment with MDT (Multidrug therapy – the standard treatment for leprosy recommended by WHO). However, uninterrupted access to MDT by people affected by leprosy, especially in difficult to reach areas can be a challenge and the effort needs to be intensified.

People affected by leprosy face stigma and discrimination which results in exclusion from families and communities and also loss of access to means of employment, education and healthcare. This also leads to denial of basic rights for people affected by leprosy.

In India, there are at least 15 laws with direct/indirect discriminatory provisions against people affected by leprosy. These laws allow leprosy as a ground for divorce, prevention of people affected by leprosy from travelling in trains, obtaining driving licences, etc. It is pertinent to note that these laws were passed when there was no cure for leprosy. Now that leprosy is completely curable with MDT, there is no justification for these discriminatory laws to exist. Some of the laws, that have discriminatory provision are: - Hindu Marriage Act 1955; Special Marriage Act 1954; Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act 1939; India Christian Marriage Act 1872; Indian Divorce Act 1869; Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act 1956; Prevention of Begging Act 1959 (Maharashtra, Gujarat and Karnataka); Life Insurance Corporation Act, as amended in November 1987. These laws need to be amended at the earliest to protect and promote the human rights of people affected by leprosy.

The word "leper" contributes to ongoing stigmatisation and discrimination of persons affected by this disease, because the word "leper" resurrects ideas, images and associations of leprosy as it was in the past, when much less was known about this disease and treatment and cure was uncertain, there was much nerve damage and more impairments and persons with leprosy tended to be segregated from the rest of the population.

Reflecting the need for dignifying language, The Commissioning & Development Editor, Mr. Gerry Breslin for Collins Language at Harper Collins Publishers UK, indicated to the ILEP (The International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations) Secretariat that he agrees on the need to make amendments to their on-line English Language Dictionary entry on the word "leper". He further stated that the amendments will appear on-line in approximately a month's time and that other relevant dictionaries produced by them will be amended accordingly when they are due for revision or reprint.

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About The Leprosy Mission Trust India (TLMTI):

Over the last 138 years, TLMTI through its presence in 8 states with 14 hospitals, 6 Vocational Training Centres, 10 Community Development Projects, 5 old age homes, state of art Research Laboratory, Research Resource Centre, Centre for Media, Communication and Media Advocacy and technical support to the National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP) has helped cure many millions of people affected by leprosy.

In addition to the treatment provided, TLMTI has also helped to prevent further disability, reduce stigma and discrimination, and restore dignity to those affected. Inclusive development, sustainable livelihoods etc

30th January 2013 marks a significant milestone in the continuing fight against leprosy. On the occasion of Anti - Leprosy Day we renew our commitment to ensuring that all persons affected by leprosy have access to the necessary treatment, rehabilitation and care, without prejudice and stigma, in a world where all human beings have the right to live their lives with dignity.

About Leprosy

- Leprosy is a mildly infectious disease caused by a bacterium called *Mycobacterium leprae* (a relative of the tuberculosis bacterium or 'TB' germ).
- The diagnosis and treatment of leprosy is very simple and early diagnosis and treatment with multidrug therapy (MDT) remains the key elements in eliminating the disease as a public health concern.
- Untreated, leprosy can cause progressive and permanent damage to the skin, nerves, limbs and eyes. This can lead to disability resulting in visible deformities and ulcers. . Leprosy also damages nerves in the face causing problems with blinking, eventually leading to blindness.
- It is not hereditary and it cannot be caught by touch.
- Leprosy is like any other diseases and not a 'curse' or 'the cause of one's past sins.'
- Leprosy is curable with multidrug therapy (MDT), which was developed in the 1980s. Lack of education, however, means that many people affected by leprosy are still stigmatised, even after they have been cured, especially if the disease has caused disability.

Leprosy is a disease. Those affected deserve dignity not discrimination.